

**The History of the Million Man March:
A Major African American Post-Civil Rights Accomplishment**

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Abstract

This senior thesis is an overview of the lives of African American men in the 1990s. A major event occurred during this period, The Million Man March was this event that occurred during 1995 of October. Different leaders and groups played a (historical/significant) role in shaping African American men during this time. Leaders such as Elijah Muhamad and Louis Farrakhan framed the Nation of Islam (NOI), an organization for black pride and atonement for black men. Bill McCartney sought to bring pride to other males from setting up an organization such as the Promise Keepers (1990). These two groups, while they seem on opposite ends of the spectrum, aligned together and played a major role in framing the objective of the Million Man March and Stand In the Gap rally. While receiving criticism from the public and media, this march had a positive impact for African Americans and was considered a success. This march, led by Louis Farrakhan, had 400,000 people in attendance at Washington D.C. From the events leading up to this march, along with the aftermath, it created a sense of responsibility and atonement for black males everywhere.

Introduction: The Million Man March and the Nation of Islam

After the civil rights movement, some African Americans questioned what is next? While the late 1960s and so on brought different events for blacks, one march helped define black men, morale, and strengthen African American communities. The Million Man March seemed to be just what black communities needed. The Leader of the Nation of Islam (NOI) Louis Farrakhan, sought out to make a change for blacks. To understand what this event was and what it accomplished, it is important to understand what the Nation of Islam stood for, who the leaders of this event were, and what the leaders hope to accomplish from this event. The NOI was founded in the year 1930. This organization had Islam ideals, along with Black Nationalist ideas. Islam was brought to the United States by African Muslim slaves. This group started to take flight in the 1930s, when Wallace D. Fard and his assistant Elijah Muhammad found this group in Detroit, Michigan. This organization originally saw some whites as evil and people who tried to suppress blacks. The NOI encouraged blacks to open businesses and separate themselves from white society. Leaders also encouraged blacks to drop their surnames that originated from slavery.

This event had many different members that played a role in enabling this march to be successful. However, one man played a major role for this march. Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the NOI at the time of this march in 1995, called upon his fellow brothers to help prompt a change. Farrakhan had studied and learned under his mentor Elijah Muhammad. Through his

teachings, Farrakhan understood post-civil rights blacks were far away from what the NOI had envisioned. Through his observation, Farrakhan pushed for many different programs and events leading up to the march. He not only sought out blacks in America, but he also opened the organization globally. However, he resided in the United States, he wanted to make a distinct change there first. Leading up to this Million Man March, blacks saw issues within their community's post-civil rights. Black men saw high incarceration rates, gang violence, and troubled homes among families. When the year of 1995 came, the NOI acted and launched a much-needed event. Many of these issues were at an all-time high when it the early 1990s.

The leaders of this event wanted African American men to be accountable for their actions. Different members of the NOI saw black men commit crime and adultery leading up to this march. These actions were not acceptable to the NOI. One of the goals of this march was to turn black men away from these actions. "We now have to be trained and organized to be effective in all of our communities, to get our young men away from crime and violence into productive lives."¹ Farrakhan and other leaders wanted to inspire African American men to live and act by the standards the NOI expects of them. Although this march focused on black men, it also included black women. "The value of women, brothers is so great, and one of us who underestimate the value of women is not thinking correctly."² Farrakhan and his counterparts did not portray more importance in men than women.

Leaders of this march saw blacks and whites having great strain and tension in 1995. This was one of the main reasons this march needed to take place. Rev. Benjamin F. Chavis,

¹ Daniel McNeil, *20th Anniversary of The Million Man March* (Daniel B. McNeil, 2015), 47.

² Daniel McNeil, *20th Anniversary of The Million Man March*, 51.

national director of the march, saw a racial divide in our country and he believed this march could help heal it.³ This racial divide was seen through violence, poor black communities, and the crime rates that existed in America. Rev. Benjamin F. Chavis stated that blacks need a march to discuss and help fix these issues. Many critics saw this march as an event to put down whites. This was not the goal leaders had in mind. I will examine different critiques of this march in a later section. Rev. Benjamin F. Charles also wanted to stress the importance of black on black violence within this march:

“If we can improve our quality of life, we can renew benefits to other people, he said. If we can stop black-on-black crime, all crime will go down. If we can build strong economic development, if young men can find employment, if they can get a good education, then the whole of society benefits.”⁴

Leaders of this march made it a priority to stress that African American communities needed improvement.

Promise Keepers and the NOI

The Nation of Islam had a major impact for African American males before and during the time of the 1995 Million Man March. As mentioned before this group became relevant after it was founded in 1930. However, Farrakhan, the leader at the time of the march, did not play a major role until around the 1970s. As the NOI sought out to help frame African American men, a similar group came onto the scene during the 1990s. This group was called the Promise

³ “The March on Washington” *The New York Times*, last modified October 16, 1995. Accessed November 1, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/16/us/march-washington-overview-debate-march-farrakhan-persists-black-men-converge.html?pagewanted=2>

⁴ Ibid.

Keepers. This group (primarily made up of white catholic men), like the NOI, wanted to teach men the proper way of living. This organization was founded by Bill McCartney, a former football coach at the University of Colorado. Bill McCartney envisioned a large group of men meeting and living by the way in which the lord wanted. He envisioned a gathering of 50,000 men at the University of Colorado's Folsom Field for training and teaching on what it means to be godly men.⁵ The Promise Keepers had seven core promises they were to live by. Promise one: A Promise Keeper is committed to honoring Jesus Christ through worship, prayer and obedience to God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit. Promise two: A Promise Keeper is committed to pursuing vital relationships with a few other men, understanding that he needs brothers to help him keep his promises. Promise three: A Promise Keeper is committed to practicing spiritual, moral, ethical, and sexual purity. Promise four: A Promise Keeper is committed to building strong marriages and families through love, protection and biblical values. Promise five: A Promise Keeper is committed to supporting the mission of his church by honoring and praying for his pastor, and by actively giving his time and resources. Promise six: A Promise Keeper is committed to reaching beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity. Promise seven: A Promise Keeper is committed to influencing his world, being obedient to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.⁶

Like the NOI, the Promise Keepers set out to keep men from committing sin, living a honest and ethical life, and to be better fathers and husbands to their family, similarly to the NOI the Promise Keepers saw these three issues as major issues within their seven promises,

⁵ "PK History" Promise Keepers, last modified October, 2016, accessed November 2, 2016, <https://promisekeepers.org/pk-history>

⁶ "PK History" Promise Keepers

that needed to be fixed.⁷ Bill McCartney and other leaders had high expectations for how many men they could convert to living in this manner. As mentioned before, they expected as many as of 50,000 men to be in attendance for the first official meeting. They failed short of these high expectations, as roughly as 4,200 men attended the first conference. At this conference, this group made it clear what made a man a Promise Keeper: Christian men who were willing to take a stand for God in their marriages, families, churches, and communities. Revival and discipleship are the two elements that became the foundation and focus of Promise Keepers.⁸ As the message of this group became clearer, the Promise Keepers started to see a rise in numbers. At a meeting in Colorado, this group saw around 22,000 men and pastors.

As the NOI hosted a major event to atone for their wrong doings and to ask their families for forgiveness, the Promise Keepers hosted a similar event that promoted the same actions. Instead of the Million Man March, this group hosted an event called Stand In the Gap. This march encouraged all men of different races, nationalities, and most Christian denominations to attend. This group had an estimated amount of one million men in attendance. The Stand In the Gap rally consisted of around six hours of standing, along with an abundance of prayer for sins and confessions to the lord. The Stand In the Gap rally was a live event. C-Span aired this rally, along with other international news outlets.

As this senior thesis is on the history of the Million Man March, it is important to discuss a similar group like the Promise Keepers. The NOI and Promise Keepers have similarities that many people would never imagine. As mentioned before, both of these groups encouraged

⁷ Bill McCartney, *Seven Promises of A Promise Keeper* (Bill Bright: Word Pub, 1999), 152.

⁸ "PK History" Promise Keepers

men to turn away from a life of sin and live by certain standards. Both leaders (Farrakhan and McCartney) recognized that men needed a major event, in which they could gather and be inspired to live by these group standards. Leading up to both of these events, many men took interest in these gatherings. That reasoning would help explain why both groups saw a significant rise in membership. The Promise Keepers saw about 450,000 men attend 19 stadium and arena conferences around the United States.⁹ The NOI saw their attendance rise as well. This group grew to over 300,000 prior to the march being held.

Through studying my sources, historians have classified these two events having a similar and positive impact for men. The Million Man March was defined as a Day of Atonement, reconciliation, and responsibility. Speakers at this event encouraged black men to stop making excuses and to be responsible husbands and fathers, and to atone for misusing children and women. Many men misused women and children through adultery, lack of father ship, or abuse. Leaders at the Stand In the Gap rally encouraged a similar sentiment to those of the Million Man March. Like speakers at the Million Man March, these leaders also spoke to men about sins they have committed and defined the importance of what it meant to be a good father and husband. During the Stand In the Gap rally, leaders encouraged members of the audience to take out pictures of family members they had wronged.¹⁰ While members had these photos out, they were to confess their sins and atone for them. Through prayer and reflection, they asked for forgiveness for their wrong doings. Judith Newton informs us that these two events reminded him of a notable event in the early 1960s. Newton did not attend

⁹ "PK History" Promise Keepers, last modified 2016, accessed November 2, 2016, <https://promisekeepers.org/pk-history>

¹⁰ Judith Newton, *From Panthers To Promise Keepers* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 27

the March on Washington in which Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his “I have a dream speech”. The speakers at these events evoked and referenced King’s speech from the 1960s. At the Million Man March, the March on Washington was referred to by name multiple times. Leaders at the Million Man March used this speech as motivation at the march, but also to reiterate that King’s dream had yet to be fulfilled.¹¹ These speakers informed the crowd that economic equality had yet to be reached. At the Stand In the Gap rally one speaker also referred to King’s “I have a dream speech”. The speaker at this rally encourages the crowd to not make the same mistakes that past Christians made. He discusses the silence many Christians had during the 1960s. Christians must still repent in his eyes, while working toward ending racial injustices.¹² These two marches had more in common than just their location at Washington D.C.

While some members of the public praised these two events, others criticized these rallies. The Stand In the Gap rally received negative comments from the National Black Lesbian and Gay leadership forum. The leader of the National Black Lesbian had a concern about the Promise Keepers. This organization pointed out the Promise Keepers had 96 percent white membership. They also saw that the Promise Keepers were failing to recognize the racial advantage given by whites within society.¹³ Other members of the public saw the Promise Keepers hosting the Stand In the Gap rally not as an uplifting event, but rather an event that would make the Million Man March look poor. They believed the Stand In the Gap rally was a competitive response to the march. The Promise Keepers produced more locations and people

¹¹ Judith Newton, *From Panthers To Promise Keepers* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 28.

¹² *Ibid.*, 30.

¹³ Kelly Oliver, *Subjectivity without Subjects: From Abject Fathers to Desiring Mothers* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 16.

compared to the NOI. The Million Man March received criticism as well. This event was seen as racist and sexist by some within the public. The claim was that this march did not encourage women to take part or join the movement. Others claimed that this event was racist in the fact that it gave off a stigma that whites were not allowed to attend.

Both of these marches wanted to portray an image of what a real man was and how he should behave. Pledges were taken by men at both of these events. For the NOI and the Million Man March this pledge was:

“I Pledge from this day forward I will never abuse my wife by striking her or disrespecting her, for she is the mother of my children and the producer of my future”.¹⁴“Just like the Promise Keepers rally, the Million Man March produced rhetoric for men to understand what manliness was and how to live a life of a true and genuine man. This philosophy gained the attention of men from both groups. One marcher of the Million Man March says we have marched to tell ourselves and the nation that we want to be real men”.¹⁵

Marchers at the Million Man March understood that it was not acceptable to hurt loved ones and it was crucial that they fulfill their duties. Louis Farrakhan wanted to disprove the image of black men being stereotypes. He and other leaders of this march not only wanted to inspire blacks, but also give a positive image to the public. Farrakhan and others wanted to show the nation a different image of black men and how they presented themselves. Men who attended this march wanted to put an end to people viewing blacks as violent, dangerous, and irresponsible. Many blacks were feared on urban streets and black neighborhoods. These were images that this march sought to put an end to.

¹⁴ Kelly Oliver, *Subjectivity without Subjects: From Abject Fathers to Desiring Mothers*, 16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

When it came to these two events, the media had a response. The Media was very critical of the Million Man March and very forgiving of the Stand In the Gap rally and showed praise to this event. This rally was seen by the media as a harmless and very positive event. The liberal press saw this rally as fathers trying to better their family situation and become better men. Many conservative press outlets saw the Million Man March as a negative event. These media outlets claimed that Farrakhan and the march promoted anti-Semitism. Some member believed Farrakhan and the NOI had a hate for Judaism. They believed that this march was homophobic and separated blacks and whites.¹⁶ Many members of the LGBTQ community at the time believed the NOI had a disregard for their community and saw their sexual orientation as wrong. The same conservative media outlets praised the Promise Keepers, although the premise of the leaders of the Promise Keepers was very similar to the Farrakhan and his counterparts. However, some members within the liberal press did provide criticism to the Promise Keepers. Some of these members echoed the same sentiments that the conservative press had against the NOI. The biggest criticism the liberal media had against the Promise Keepers was the fact they believed this group and rally did not address institutional racism. While both group did receive criticism, some comments made attacks not just on the leaders, but also on the members and the people as a whole.

One member of the conservative media called out blacks as a whole leading up to this event. This member of the conservative media did not understand what Farrakhan and blacks were trying to accomplish with the Million Man March. They believed blacks had advanced,

¹⁶ Kelly Oliver, *Subjectivity without Subjects: From Abject Fathers to Desiring Mothers*, 17.

since Dr. King's address in 1963. He suggested that blacks should stop complaining and whining, instead they should recognize and be proud of the achievements they had made. He also believed that blacks had white resentment and should be grateful to whites for having civil rights.¹⁷ Other members of the conservative media saw Farrakhan and members of the NOI, along with many other blacks, as wicked and set out to divide the country. However, many of these same media outlets and magazines had a different opinion when it came to people who were part of the Promise Keepers. These same members of the conservative media believed angry white men who joined the promise keepers did not promote separation. The reasoning behind these thoughts dealt with the difference in race from a historical standpoint. Since their historical backgrounds differ, so did the premise of both groups. This same media outlet believed that the politics of their moralities differed. This was the reasoning a group like the Promise Keepers was an acceptable group, whereas the NOI and the Million Man March was not.

The Promise Keeper and the NOI had very similar objectives. Both of these groups wanted to inspire men to be the best that they can be. They both recognized that events leading up to the 1990s were keeping men from living by the manner, in which they should. Both of these groups wanted to host events in which they could get men back on the right track. At the Million Man March and the Stand In the Gap rally, many speakers spoke words encouraging men. Many of these words involved men taking a stand and admitting the sins and faults they have committed. Leaders at both these events asked for men to atone for their

¹⁷ Kelly Oliver, *Subjectivity without Subjects: From Abject Fathers to Desiring Mothers*, 18.

wrongdoings through prayers, acceptance, and awareness that they have done wrong. As referenced before, both of these events recalled Dr. King's "I have a dream speech", to appeal to the people in attendance. For the NOI and the Million Man March this speech was addressed to show members that Dr. King's dream had yet to be achieved. They used this speech to encourage black men to keep working toward progress and to turn away from a life of crime, to be a great husbands, and great fathers. The Promise Keepers used this speech a little differently. Speakers and leaders at the Stand In the Gap rally used this speech to show members that Dr. King's mission has yet to be achieved and all men must take fault for that. They pointed out during the 1960s many Christians remained silent during civil rights. Not enough had been achieved on their part. This group recognized that this country had a racial divide, much like members of the NOI. Leaders and members of the Promise Keepers set out to fix the divide and injustices by African Americans face.¹⁸ Both these events had similar goals and fittingly, they were criticized similarly. The lack of women at these events raised many eyebrows, especially with the female and liberal eye. Both groups responded to this criticism in a similar manner. They claimed that these events were to better men and lead them in a direction in which women would receive better treatment. Through the media, the NOI and Million Man March took a little more criticism than the Promise Keepers. From different conservative media outlets, the Million Man March was criticized as being racist,¹⁹ these outlets did not like the fact that these marches produced an image of excluding white people. However, these same outlets did not address the Stand In the Gap rally and the lack of the

¹⁸ Bill McCartney, *Seven Promises of A Promise Keeper*, 152.

¹⁹ Kelly Oliver, *Subjectivity without Subjects: From Abject Fathers to Desiring Mothers*, 18.

feeling of inclusion when it came to African Americans. When we think of the Million Man March, many times we do not connect it with the Stand In the Gap rally and the Promise Keepers. Although these two events received similar and different criticism by the media and other people, the leaders of both of these events had similar goals for men. The goal of each of these events were to help better men and to turn away from violence, while being the best possible husband and father they could possibly be.

What this March meant to African Americans

The Million Man March was a comparable event to the Stand In the Gap rally hosted by the Promise Keepers. Throughout this paper, I have examined what this march was, what leaders of this march hoped to accomplish, and another event that set out to accomplish similar goals. It is important to understand what leaders had hoped this march would achieve and compare it to what people actually felt, who attended and knew about this event. This march had a large attendance, through my research, I was able to obtain memoirs from people who attended and followed this march.

Many men who attended this march had a very positive experience. They saw this march as a necessary event. As I referred to early on, leaders of this march recognized the issue of blacks committing crimes at a high rate. Around the time of the march, one in every three black men in their twenties were jailed, paroled, or on probation.²⁰ Farrakhan and other leaders recognized this statistic and this was one of the driving forces for hosting the Million Man March. Wade Hudson, from East Orange, New Jersey, had a very impactful experience:

²⁰ Kelly Oliver, *Subjectivity without Subjects: From Abject Fathers to Desiring Mothers*, 17.

“The Million Man March has been one of the signature events of my life. For one day, confounding the naysayers, using all modes of transportation, representing all walks of life, Black men, approaching a million if not more, came together in our nation’s capital. They stood tall, majestic and united. I was proud to be among them.”²¹

Mr. Hudson’s comments show that this march gave off a feeling of brotherhood. The leaders of this march wanted and needed to accomplish this feeling among the men in attendance. They wanted to slow down and stop black on black violence. Creating a sense of unity started to go a long ways toward accomplishing this.

This march also had African American men, who were part of a media outlet in attendance. As I have examined different conservative and liberal media outlets and their feelings toward the march, I have not yet discussed what a black media outlet thought of this march, who were in attendance. Terry Neal from Reston, VA, was a reporter for the *Washington Post* attending this march and had a very positive experience.

“I was there — as a reporter for the *Washington Post*. In fact, it was my story that ran on the front page of the *Post* the next day. I recall the complex emotions I felt trying to negotiate my role as an objective observer with my role as a human and a black man, who was so proud of that glorious moment of brotherhood and revelry”.²²

Although other media outlets had said many negative comments about this march, black media outlets differed and saw this event as a step forward. Mr. Neal informs us that this march struck his emotions. Like Mr. Hudson’s comments, we again see that this march brought a feeling of brotherhood among blacks. Having these comments being present in the media, helped give African Americans who could not attend inspiration and hope going forward.

²¹ Gene Park, “The Million Man March’s legacy, as told by people who were there 20 years ago,” *Washington Post*, October 16, 2015, accessed November 3, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2015/10/06/were-you-at-the-million-man-march-tell-us-your-story/?utm_term=.2090aa0a0c60

²² Gene Park, “The Million Man March’s legacy, as told by people who were there 20 years ago”

Another man was able to attend and even bring two of his younger sons with. This man discussed how warm and open he and his sons felt while being a part of this march. Henry Johnson was struck by the fact all these men came to help achieve a peaceful result within their communities going forward. Mr. Johnson, from Alexandria, VA, shared his experience with the media.

“I did indeed march in the Million man march and took my youngest two sons who were 14 and 8 at the time. I remember the passion and pride I felt from being in a crowd of positive black men from all over America. My sons stood and sat with me all day and never complained. The key point for me was the warmth I felt from all these normal men like me coming together for a common cause with peaceful results. Keep pumping my brothers”.²³

Like the other two experiences, Mr. Johnson saw this event as a step in the right direction for blacks. He also liked the fact that this event was diverse. Not diverse in the fact of race, but rather diverse in the fact that men from all over came to this event. Having blacks from all over the country was very important for this march. Farrakhan and the leaders wanted to portray their message to blacks all over America. It was important that blacks from all over gained exposure of this event. This was accomplished, as seen by Mr. Johnson’s comments.

This march also had children in attendance. It was important that this march had youth at the event. In order to help fix black communities, the youth needed exposure to the movement at hand. Much of black crime and violence was done by younger black men. Roger Newkirk from Washington, D.C. was able to attend this event.

“I was 14 years old and a freshman in high school. Didn’t really know the significance, our male mentor of the church took all the young men as a group. The importance of that day didn’t hit me until we reached the Mall and all the love that was just in the air.

²³ Ibid.

Black men welcoming and fellowshiping with one another nonviolently as far as the eye could see. Beautiful moment that I'm glad I was a part of".²⁴

This event was inspiring to young men like Newkirk. Young blacks who are the future and leaders of this march understood that. That is why they made it a point to try and get younger blacks to this event. This March could cut crime down and create a better perspective of blacks through the public eye.

As many other attendees echoed similar sentiments, leaders seemed to have accomplished their goal of inspiring and getting blacks back on track by living in the way of the NOI. As this march was to get men to become better husbands and fathers, it was just important to inspire the youth. From just these four memoirs alone, we see that three members of the black youth were able to attend. Through research, I was not only able to find a memoir from a black youth, I was also able to obtain a speech giving by a young black child pertaining to the Million Man March.

A day after the March, a young man by the name of Mr. Ayinde Jean- Baptiste, spoke about this march. He was only twelve years old, yet he gave a very inspiring and well thought speech after the march. Mr. Ayinde Jean- Baptiste informs us that, when you stop making excuses, when you start standing with our mothers, when you start teaching us to be humane, then we can build a new nation of strong people.²⁵ As a young man, Mr. Ayinde Jean- Basptiste understood that this march called upon all men to treat women better. Much of the criticism of this march stemmed from the fact that no women were able to attend. This young man

²⁴ Gene Park, "The Million Man March's legacy, as told by people who were there 20 years ago"

²⁵ "One Young Man Spreads Powerful Message at Million Man March," *NBC Nightly News*, October 17, 1995, accessed November 4, 2016, <https://static.nbclearn.com/files/nbcarchives/site/pdf/3107.pdf>

acknowledges that this march was about treating women better. Mr. Ayinde Jean- Basptiste also understood the fact that this march was to stop violence. It was supposed to be a day for black men to, reconcile with each other, to stop gang violence, and whatnot.²⁶ Much like Mr. Johnson, young Mr. Ayinde Jean- Basptiste recognized the issue of crime within the black community. The leaders of this march did not only appeal to older men, they were able to accomplish getting the younger generation involved with the march. This was very key for the African American community going forward in the eyes of the NOI.

Farrakhan and his speech

Louis Farrakhan had help from other members of the NOI promoting and running the Million Man March. However, he was the main speaker at this event. Farrakhan gave a long and thoughtful address to the members in the attendance. As well thought and inspiring Farrakhan's speech was, Dr. Weber found that it may not be as effective as he had hoped. Contrary to what some of the memoirs said, Dr. Weber found that Farrakhan did not connect with the audience as much as he had hoped. Claiming that perhaps his speech was long, dragged out, and boring. They even claimed that Farrakhan himself sensed he was losing his audience. Even Farrakhan seemed to notice that his lecture, as he called it, failed to keep the crowd's attention. More than five times during the speech, Farrakhan assured his audience that he was "almost finished".²⁷ Dr. Weber points out that people started to become restless and

²⁶ "One Young Man Spreads Powerful Message at Million Man March"

²⁷ Jill M. Weber "MINISTER LOUIS FARRAKHAN, MILLION MAN MARCH" (PhD diss. The Pennsylvania University, 2007) 170-188, accessed November 5, 2016, <http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/weber-farrakhan.pdf>

disengaged with what Farrakhan had to say. They pointed out that there was an excitement and buzz in the air at this event. Dr. Weber even pointed out moments before Farrakhan took the podium people were cheering and yelling. When Farrakhan took the stage, the cheers became very loud. After Farrakhan started to speak, this excitement started to dwindle away.

“A cheer rose when Farrakhan finally took the podium, yet when he started to speak, many were visibly let down. Within fifteen minutes, Farrakhan began to lose the crowd, some drifting toward benches to rest their feet, some heading toward the train stations or bus depots for their long rides home”.²⁸

Through this statement, it seemed that Farrakhan lacked the ability to appeal to the emotions of the audience. With such excitement in the air, no person should have been leaving early.

The same writer points out that Farrakhan’s speech did not succeed as he hoped, due to his credibility. Many people in the media and the public disliked Farrakhan. Leading up to the march, many different types of character questions arose about Farrakhan and other members of the NOI. He and other members of the NOI were seen as racist, radical, and stubborn to social change by people. Some thought Farrakhan saw whites as evil, similar to what people believed of a young Malcolm X. A writer by the name of Taylor Gardell examined the style in which Farrakhan presented his speech:

“Although Farrakhan may have toned-down his defiant rhetorical style a bit at the Million Man March, he certainly did not abandon that style altogether. Consistent with his past rhetoric, Farrakhan's highly militant and divisive speech attacked the values of the present culture and promoted alternative interpretations of reality that provided the marchers with motives for action on behalf of social change”.²⁹

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Jill M. Weber “MINISTER LOUIS FARRAKHAN, MILLION MAN MARCH ”

Other writers, analysts, and critics were not the only people who disagreed with Farrakhan. Many people who traveled to Washington D.C also had similar feelings. Some thought he was radical and unfit to host such an event. Many of the same criticisms I have discussed earlier in the paper, turned many people away from Farrakhan and this march. However, Farrakhan did address these criticisms he received on his character. He responded by stating "there is no prophet of God in the Bible that did not have a defect in his character. But, I have never heard any member of the faith of Judaism separate David from the Psalms, because of what happened in David's life . . . you never separated any of the Great Servants of God".³⁰ In this quote from Farrakhan, he addresses as a man he is not perfect either. He tries to live and abide by the way of the lord, in the best way that he can. Through his speech to fellow men and brothers he does not ask them to be perfect. He calls upon them to be the best possible men they can be and live in a manner that would make the lord proud.

Why Farrakhan saw the march as a necessary means

Throughout this paper, the Million Man March has been highlighted as both a positive and negative event. Another group in the Promise Keepers have also been highlighted similarly. Leaders of both of these marches wanted to host these two events for similar reasons. They wanted men to atone for their sins and turn away from a life of crime. As we grasp why the leaders wanted to host an event like the Million Man March, it is important to see why Louis Farrakhan saw it necessary, as well of examining what was occurring in black communities around the time of this march.

³⁰ Jill M. Weber "MINISTER LOUIS FARRAKHAN, MILLION MAN MARCH, " 2.

Earlier in this paper, a brief statistic dealing with black men and incarceration rates is mentioned. As this statistic is important in the reasoning behind Farrakhan and this march, there are many other issues dealing with black men and crime. Gardell, the author of *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad* examines Farrakhan's feelings and what was going on in African American communities. According to this book in the spring of 1992, forty seven percent of black men in Los Angeles showed up in a gang database.³¹ This statistic shows that previous to the Million Man March, the issue of violence was prevalent in African American communities. Farrakhan saw this number and knew something had to be done. This was not the only statistic that highlighted black men needed change.

Gardell also highlights that this issue of black gang violence is present elsewhere as well. The issues of black men in gangs stretches from coast to coast, while also hitting some Midwestern states hard. Around 50,000 gang members belonging to different networks and nations existed in 1992.³² Farrakhan responded to these stats by trying to reach out to the youth. He informed them they were playing into the hands of society. Exclaiming sentiments that this is what people expect blacks to do, they are playing into the hand of the devil and ignoring the proper way a man should live. Farrakhan saw rich whites as being part of the problem for this gang violence. He saw that these whites were selling guns to blacks and feeding them to the community.³³ He saw these same people pumping drugs into these

³¹ Mattias Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 286.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.,287.

communities and believed this was a way in which some of these elite whites were keeping blacks down.

While the issue of crime and drug use was on the rise in 1992 and 1993 in many black communities, Farrakhan knew actions needed to be taken. Before the 1995 March, the NOI put forth other actions to help blacks. As high violence and drug use were present in these communities during these years, police watch and action were at an all-time high. Many blacks discussed the poor treatment of police. Many said they were racially profiled and treated very unfairly, due to strict police watch. In response, the NOI started to reach out to many of these criminals. Many different reform programs and rehabilitation programs were put in by the NOI. Many different social workers noted the major role the NOI played in helping these criminals.³⁴ The NOI and Farrakhan also sent ministers into some of these prisons. These ministers would reiterate the teachings of Elijah Muhammad and self-respect for these men. After many of these criminals would be released from prison, if they chose to follow and live by the ways of the NOI, they would have a spot within the organization. Many of these men were given a spot in a mosque to help with teaching others to abide by the way of the NOI.

As in previous sections of this paper, Farrakhan had been heavily criticized due to his character and belief that he was not a likeable leader. This criticism can be disputed by Gardwell in their book. According to this novel, Farrakhan was very well liked within black communities. A series of polls were completed to see who some of the most well-known black leaders were in the years 1994-1995. The CNN and Time poll, found that Farrakhan was the

³⁴ Ibid, 306.

second most well-known black leader, only behind reverend Jesse Jackson and Supreme Court Justice Clarence, who were tied at first.³⁵ These polls also extended further than just if Farrakhan was known. They included if Farrakhan was well-liked and seen as role model for blacks. These polls concluded that they found him to be an effective leader and role model. Sixty seven percent found him to be effective, sixty two believed he was good for black communities, and fifty three believed he was a role model.³⁶ After these poll results came out, what did this mean for Farrakhan? He saw this as a great opportunity to hold a major event, that would help slow down violence and crime, while speaking to his fellow brothers. He and his fellow leaders took this opportunity to host the Million Man March. The results of these polls showed that many blacks felt similar to Farrakhan and understood there was an issue involving black men in the United States. These polls reflect the large turnout at the march.

Evidence of a success and improvement

Today in 2016, we still see similar issues to what the leaders of the Million Man March sought to fix. However, one can argue from the 1995 march, improvement has come for black communities. In 2008, our country saw the first black president elected into office. This man was Barrack Obama, who ironically was in attendance of this march in 1995. From this march, we did not only have a future president of the United States in Attendance, but we also saw many other notable people in attendance. The wife of Malcolm X, Betty Shabazz, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Martin Luther King III, Rosa Parks, and singer Stevie Wonder, among others.³⁷

³⁵ Mattias Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 315.

³⁶ Ibid, 315.

³⁷ Rick Riley, "8 Facts About the First Million Man March in 1995 You May Not Know," *Atlanta Black Star*, October 21, 2015, accessed December 10, 2016, <http://atlantablackstar.com/2015/10/21/8-facts-about-the-first-million-man-march-in-1995-you-may-not-know/>

Would an event that was deemed unimportant receive attendance from such notable people? The answer to me is no. Betty Shabazz, Martin Luther King III, and Rosa Parks, all had been previous activists striving for change. The fact they would show up to an event, with 400,000 people in attendance seeking to do the same as they all did, shows the magnitude of this event. For Farrakhan to get these people to this event, shows he did indeed promote this event well. For such notable people to show up, along with the large attendance, and the positive feelings during and after, shows me that this event was indeed a success. The next question one may ask, how can you prove that this event has been successful leading up to 2016? Well, since this event some evidence has proved that blacks have seen change since 1994-1995. For example, black men have become more educated since 1995. In 1995, 73.4 percent of African-American men had high school degrees. In 2004, 84.3 percent did, according to the Census Bureau.³⁸ A little later after 2004, we saw crime decrease for African Americans as well. Law enforcement agencies made 3.5 million arrests of blacks in 1994, which was 30.9 percent of all arrests, the FBI said. By 2013, the latest available data, African-American arrests had decreased to 2.5 million, 28 percent of all arrests.³⁹ These are just two examples of improvement for African Americans, however these are two major ones. The high turnout, notable people in attendance, and improved education, along with lower crime rates, prompts me to believe that this march did indeed improve the lives of African Americans. Farrakhan and his counterparts achieved some of what they were striving to accomplish.

³⁸ Jesse Holland, "Spirit of family reunion marks Million Man March anniversary," *Washington Times*, October 10, 2015, accessed December 10, 2016, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/oct/10/black-men-gathering-for-million-man-march-20th-ann/>

³⁹ Jesse Holland, "Spirit of family reunion marks Million Man March anniversary"

Conclusion

The Million Man March is one of the most inspiring and major events post-civil rights for African Americans. The march had an outstanding turnout, much to the pleasure of Louis Farrakhan and his leaders. An estimated 400,000 people were in attendance, with some of that number being some very notable people. Not only leaders of this march considered it to be success from the large turnout, many other African Americans across the United States were pleased by the large turnout. This march saw black men from all over the country take part. Many other black men who were not able to attend also monitored and praised this event. This was key for the NOI because this event had to extend further than just the local level. Black communities all over the country needed work, not just the ones in LA or close to Washington D.C.

This March was not just inspiring to blacks, but it also sparked another major event within the United States. The Promise Keepers saw this march as a success and followed it up with the Stand In the Gap rally in 1997. This rally had a large attendance as well and followed many of the same ideals that the Million Man March did. This rally referenced Dr. King's "I have a Dream Speech" much like the Million Man March did. At this rally, the issues of race within society is also addressed. Speakers at this rally encouraged members to recognize their past failures of Christians during the civil rights era in the 1960s. They state failures like this cannot happen again. These leaders recognized the racial divide within the United States. Similar to the Million Man March, this rally also encouraged men to behave properly. They called for men to

atone for their past sins, ask for forgiveness, and to be the best possible fathers and husbands they can be, while treating women with the utmost respect.

Both of these events received criticism from the public eye and the media. Some members of the media during the time of the Million Man March and Stand In the Gap Rally believed that these events were sexist. Others saw these events as racist. Some members of the media saw the Million Man March to be flawed, based off the leadership of Farrakhan. Many questioned his character and premise. While some of these critics argue that this march was a failure because of Farrakhan, members of the black community and many other liberal media outlets, for example the *Washington Post*, feel as if it was a great success. Blacks took interest and saw Farrakhan as a role model and a positive influence for blacks. The high turnout and the march itself also showed that blacks saw this event as a major impact in their lives. The NOI and Farrakhan despite criticism hosted an event that inspired African Americans everywhere and hosted one of the largest events for black's post- civil rights. This event touched blacks all over America, shown by the comments and feelings stated by many African Americans, the large turnout, and some of the improvements we have seen today.

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